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ABSTRACT

A discussion of elementary and middle school curriculum design to meet the needs of students learning English as a Second Language (ESL) focuses on the ways in which ESL instruction can be incorporated into the curriculum. It begins with a brief review of statistics on the population of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students in the schools and their educational needs. Several options for organizing programs are described, including transitional bilingual education programs, pull-out ESL instruction, and self-contained ESL classrooms. All are seen as segregating LEP students from their peers. The rationale for "bridge" programs combining ESL with content area instruction is explained and considerations in "bridge" curriculum design are reviewed. Grouping issues are also addressed, including the advantages and disadvantages of homogeneous, heterogeneous, and cooperative learning groups. Computer-assisted instruction is discussed briefly. Finally, one integrated primary school program that has the ESL teacher preparing LEP students for curriculum topics a week in advance of the rest of the class is described. It is concluded that certain strategies are particularly promising for productive mainstreaming, including computer-assisted instruction, bilingual and pull-out programs, the whole language approach to English teaching, and cooperative learning. (MSE)

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Integrating English as a Second Language Instruction with the Regular Elementary and Middle School Curriculum: Can It Work?

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September 8, 1992

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
Introduction	1
Organizing to meet students' real needs	2
Rationale behind "Bridge" programs	3
Reorganization of schools to integrate content areas	4
Computer-assisted and other programs	6
Reporting on an integrated ESL program	7
Summary and conclusion	9
References	11

Integrating English as a Second Language Instruction
with the Regular Elementary and Middle School Curriculum:
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INTRODUCTION

In the United States it is estimated that over two million students are learning English for the first time in our public schools, kindergarten through high school (Olsen, 1989). This vast number of students from different language backgrounds, often not from the well-educated classes of their countries, poses a challenge to school administrators and teachers in many communities and demands that changes be made in curriculum development and delivery of instruction. The newcomers to the English speaking world cannot wait for years before they learn the materials covered in the curricula of districts but must absorb their new language and the subject matter simultaneously. Of the adults who are resettling as refugees in this country, Huyck and Fields (1981) reported that 48 per cent were illiterate in their own language. It is safe to say that many of these adults have children in the public schools who are not achieving at grade level and who may be severely disturbed by their experience of civil war, uprooting from their cultures, and a total lack of family adaptation to the American way of life.

Olsen, cited above, a book publisher in San Francisco, said that although 1,500,000 limited English proficient (LEP) students were reported in a 1987 national survey, an estimated three to six times that many, in his opinion, could have gone unreported. By now most education professionals agree that the students who are learning English in American classrooms need specialized instruction to prepare them for further schooling, the world of work and life. Some such students may <u>appear</u> to have sufficient functioning English language

ability but lack basic literacy and math skills in their own language. Collier (1987) stated that new arrivals who were adolescents needed as much as eight years to catch up and achieve on a level with their peers. Unfortunately since there are no regular national procedures for identifying and reporting LEP students, curriculum planners cannot describe the scope of the problem and therefore cannot plan adequately.

ORGANIZING TO MEET STUDENTS' REAL NEEDS

Jim Cummins (1986), an expert in bilingual education from Canada, pointed out that learners developed Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, that is, everyday conversational abilities, much faster than Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency that allowed them to understand and function on an academic level of achievement. Many ESL students fool teachers with their supposed fluency but they lack a deeper understanding of what they are hearing and reading and cannot give back a digested version of subject matter. These are the potential dropouts who never quite connect with school subject matter. Without a meaningful context for all subject lessons, they will not grasp academicallly demanding materials.

Transitional Bilingual programs have been organized to introduce students to English while teaching subject matter in the native language until the student knows enough language to fit into the mainstream. Often bilingual students do not learn enough English to move successfully into peer groups using the majority language, however, and, for social and political reasons, stay with their own language minority group for longer than advisable.

An alternative way to organize student groups in elementary and middle schools is to pull out students for English as a second language lessons while their classmates study subject matter in the regular classroom. This method also has drawbacks as the ESL lessons are usually unrelated to the curriculum in the

classroom and therefore do not assist the student to progress in knowledge of the content taught in his or her grade level.

Another means of organization on the elementary level is to create self-contained classes full of newcomers who are just learning English or of "transitional" students who have had two or three years of ESL but still lack the wherewithal to function at optimal levels in regular classrooms. All of the above-mentioned approaches tend to segregate children from their peers and isolate them from the mainstream of American education.

RATIONALE BEHIND "BRIDGE" PROGRAMS

In order to help students close the gap between ESL and subject matter, various scholars have come up with frameworks for combining English language instruction with content area work. Chamot and O'Malley (1987), for example, developed a "Cognitive academic language learning approach (CALLA)". Drawing on Cummins' theories of the importance of introducing academic learning skills to LEP students, Chamot and O'Malley expressed the need for a bridge between special language programs and mainstream education. They later sold this concept to Addison-Wesley which published a related series of content-area textbooks. The books claimed to emphasize "learning strategies for metacognitive, cognitive and social-affective tasks" (p. 241-2) that could be transferred to future schooling. With the subject matter integrated into the books, there was no artificial separation of a language curriculum with a social studies curriculum, for example. Because of an over-emphasis on children's literature, however, there were not enough pages devoted to other content areas.

Professors M. Snow, Met and Genesee in 1989, also published a "Conceptual Framework" for integrating language learning with content area studies since, they said, "in young children cognitive development and language development go hand in hand " (p. 201). Because each department in a school maintained its own

priority, Snow et al. recommended joint planning of curricular units so that students were not left with a fragmented day. With each subject area, social studies, for instance, the planners had to consider (a) the kind of vocabulary and language skills needed and (b) an analysis of students' actual needs. Collaboration between teachers was vital and would have the effect of allowing students to transfer skills learned in one class to another. Integration of instruction was endorsed also by Anring and Lapointe (1989) who decried the "layer cake curriculum" (p. 8) with each subject delineated but unrelated. In order to raise the level of American students' performance, Anring and Lapointe asked that districts improve supervision and curriculum development.

Other writers recommended thinking skills strategies as an important part of the curriculum for ESL students. Numrich (1987) discussed drawing on a student's prior experience as the first step in studying a text. In Tactics for Thinking (1986), a program for training students to become more aware of their ways of learning subject matter, the authors, Marzano and Paynter, viewed teachers more as coaches who directed learning strategies, not force-feed passive students. The role of teachers was to help students to organize information and be more conscious of how they processed their thoughts. Carrel, Pharis and Liberto (1989) had students think about their ways of learning and use semantic mapping to organize their knowledge. They asked teachers to consider the learning styles of various students while planning units.

REORGANIZATION OF SCHOOLS TO INTEGRATE CONTENT AREAS

The debate rages about heterogeneous versus homegeneous grouping for instruction. Where do the newcomers who are learning English fit in? If they are from a major language group in a community that offers bilingual education, eligible students, as we said above, will be placed in bilingual classes with a teacher who speaks their language. If they are not from a language group with a

large representation in a community or if their parents "opt out" of bilingual education, generally the children are scattered around in regular classsrooms. In districts that group students homogeneously they are kept together in multilingual classes or thrown to the bottom of the heap with low-achieving native born students. In a mid-Queens New York City district observed over a two year period, the onus was on the new arrivals to study their way out of the low tracks.

Slavin (1987) and others proposed an alternative method of heterogeneous grouping known as Cooperative Learning in which students work together to solve problems and study subjects. Since all "students differ in knowledge, skills, developmental stage and learning rate," (p. 110) grouping has remained a persistent issue. For the sake of efficiency of instruction, many students are grouped for at least reading and often math within their own class. Other grouping methods have children from different classes join each other for certain subjects like the Joplin Plan for reading instruction. Full nongraded plans and interclass grouping plans are also used. Some so-called gifted students are pulled out for special subject enrichment, while other slower students may be give resource room teaching to assist them to learn. Of course, teachers must "adapt their level and pace of instruction in regrouped classes to accomodate students' levels of readiness and learning rate" (p. 116). If the teachers do not tailor their teaching to the needs of the particular group, the endeavor is worthless.

Cooperative learning has groups of students attack a problem and help each other to complete a task. This method may be useful with children who are learning English because the English-speaking children can act as tutors to those newcomers and, if this assistance is not abused, should make gains themselves as it is shown that the more able students in cooperative groups tend to show

greater levels of achievement. Cohen (1990) advocated cooperative learning but said that additional adult support would be needed in classrooms that used that method of grouping.

Hudelson (1990) suggested that ESL curriculum planners who wanted to implement the goals of the content areas should look at the state and district manuals, bypass the usual textbooks and just apply the goals to ESL instruction. Using a holistic approach, teachers could engage groups of students in sets of varied activities that allowed them to interact with their peers (p. 140.) When young students were delving into the content area of The Family, for example, Hudelson would have groups fill out charts describing how members of their families perform chores and who does what. She would have older students investigate the history of different ethnic groups in the United States, gather data and publish articles. In reading Hudelson's article we see the influence of the cooperative learning philosophy, but note that a minimum command of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills would be needed for children's meaningful participation in a group.

COMPUTER-ASSISTED AND OTHER PROGRAMS

Schools have invested a great deal of money in computer-based instruction programs that include help for students who are just learning English. The programs, called Integrated Instruction Systems (IIS), were evaluated by Mark Sherry in a 1990 Phi Delta Kappan article. Sherry saw that many classroom teachers did not integrate their everyday instruction with the computer-directed instruction and the whole thing needed to be "demystified" (p. 119.) Teachers had to be trained thoroughly to use the programs and given time to absorb and then coordinate the programs with their classroom curriculum. In order to save money and space, most of the IIS machines were based in labs, presided over by

coordinators, instead of being classroom-based. Used imaginatively, the IIS can be a boon to ESL students. Extensive utilization of computer software for ESL practice is done at the United Nations International School in Manhattan, but the students are always under the guidance of an ESL teacher. They often work in pairs or threes in front of a machine.

Handscombe (1989) in Canada wrote an essay, brief but essential, on the components of a "quality program" for ESL students: namely, "an orientation program, a monitoring procedure, a program of parental involvement, a language program, and an academic upgrading program" (p. 26). Because many of the students from the Caribbean and other areas speak Creole with an English base they, too, were included in Handscombe's program as among those needing orientation and all the other components of the quality program. The book from which Handscombe's essay was taken would be a fine reference for an administrator in a district with multicultural students. Handscombe came out in favor of placing students in an integrated setting in the elementary school with additional support from trained staff who could move the children along farther into the mainstream as quickly as possible.

REPORTING ON AN INTEGRATED ESL PROGRAM

Taking a card from the deck of teacher empowerment, teachers in Ithaca, New York, started an integrated program in the primary section of the Belle Sherman School. With confidence in themselves as professional, capable planners and also with the support of an enlightened administration, the kindergarten teacher, Anne Furman, and the ESL teacher, Duane Diviney, collaborated in planning the curriculum and delivering instruction, and the lower school now has joined in the integrated approach. I watched their presentation with interest at the October

1990 Conference of New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and later received further information by mail.

Belle Sherman is a public elementary school of 410 students near Cornell University that enrolls the children of graduate students and also many children from the "downtown population" and those of seasonal workers. The turnover of children some years is 60% from September to June.

The so-called "Immersion ESL" approach has the ESL teacher working one week ahead of the entire class in order to prepare the children who are learning English for the coming concepts in the curriculum. Most of the ESL teaching is done in the actual classroom and not as a pullout program, so the ESL teacher works within a mainstream school environment, has a greater stake in the progress of the total child, and shares responsibility for parent involvement. One effect is that the ESL teacher does more math teaching. By the time the content area materials are introduced in the class, the children who are learning English already have a grip on some of the vocabulary, materials and activities. This gives them the confidence to participate as more equal members of the group.

(A similar approach is used in the Vienna Austria International School where a multilingual kindergarten class has the services of an ESL teacher three-quarters time. Team teaching becomes a must.)

At Belle Sherman, designation and selection of ESL children is done in the Spring before school starts. The ESL schedule is blocked out before the homeroom timetable and the other specials are done. Thus the usual one month delay is avoided and school starts with programs in place. With a large transient population, an ESL interviewer on duty during the summer registration period would also be important.

By contrast, Penfield (1987) interviewed classroom teachers around the country who had over 25% minority language students and found them worried about how to cope. The regular teachers expected ESL teachers to teach the children how to read and act in a culturally appropriate manner, and also to deal with parents and also train classroom teachers and administrators. Penfield agreed that ESL teachers ought to act all these roles, but she proposed the integration of content and language as one solution to the crisis.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have reviewed current literature and reports about the organization of curriculum and instruction at the elementary and middle school level as they relate to the absorption of children who are learning English as their second, third or fourth language. The integration of these students is the painful and sometimes delightful responsibility of the public schools. Since it is recognized that the old method of "throw them in the class with everyone else" was not successful, administrators and curriculum developers have created special programs and materials to make the newcomers' school time more profitable and prepare them for later participation in education and society.

Computers can assist with the instruction of ESL students, especially with programs that link up with classroom instruction from teachers. Bilingual and pullout programs aid in the transition from the first language or languages to English and it is unfortunate that English-based Creole speakers like Jamaicans or Guyanese are often not considered eligible for this assistance. The whole language approach instead of a structural grammatical approach to teaching English is now in favor with a strong content flavor to all lessons. Cooperative learning is seen as one of the best strategies to integrate non-English speaking children into the mainstream classroom.

In the New York City Public Schools, there are many programs to welcome, socialize and educate children who come from minority language backgrounds, whether they were born in Puerto Rico, another country anywhere in the world or somewhere else in the United States. Yet we see a high dropout rate among minority language students. Why is this so? The bilingual and English as second language programs give an introduction to education that is embraced by those students who come from families that have socialized them to accept and profit from education. The other incoming students who live in illiterate homes or arrive at a later age lacking the basic primary school preparation in their countries develop school skills and literacy with more difficulty. The challenge to public school systems in North America is to educate all minority language students by integrating them into mainstream classrooms and preparing them for a successful future in this English-speaking, technologically oriented part of the world.

The End

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